

Sermon for September 11, 2016 – 17th Sunday after Pentecost*

Psalm 20:6-9 (NIV84)

Theme: **We trust in the Name of the Lord our God.**

- 1) *He alone has the power to save.*
- 2) *He will keep His promises.*

⁶ *Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he answers him from his holy heaven with the saving power of his right hand.* ⁷ *Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.* ⁸ *They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm.* ⁹ *O LORD, save the king! Answer us when we call!*

Do you remember what it was like living in America before September 11, 2001? There were no long security lines at the airport. Any child, who asked nicely, could visit the cockpit of an airplane and talk to the pilot midflight. Very few people worried about terrorists. Why? “Because,” we thought, “our country is too far away from those kinds of people. Two huge oceans isolate us from most of the world. On top of this, we are the most technologically advanced country on this earth. Wouldn’t our government know if a foreign terrorist was planning something and be able to deal with them before they had the opportunity to do anything bad?”

But then something happened that we never saw coming: planes struck the Pentagon, World Trade Center and another one, headed for the capitol, crashed into a field before it could reach its destination. This was the first major, foreign attack on US soil since Pearl Harbor. Our nation was shaken to its core. The safety we once felt was gone. Sure, our government tried to reassure us that it will do everything in its power to protect us, but can it really prevent a horrific event like 9/11 from ever happening again? Will we ever be able to feel totally safe?

In our Gospel lessonⁱ for today, Jesus warned that bad things will continually happen on this earth until He comes again on the Last Day. Why? Because the earth is filled with wicked men, like the one described in Psalm 10. Does this mean that we will never feel safe on this earth? Is there no refuge from all the evil that people plan against others?

The Bible tells us that there is a place where we can be totally safe. Where is that? It’s with Jesus. With the last verses of Psalm 20 as our guide, let us meditate on this truth, under the theme: **We trust in the Name of the Lord our God.** 1) *He alone has the power to save.* 2) *He will keep His promises.*

Part One: *He alone has the power to save.*

Our sermon text is part of a psalm King David wrote for his people to sing as they prepared for battle. Right before our text, David asks the Lord to protect the king and give him victory. He

expresses confidence that the LORD would grant his request by saying: *Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he answers him from his holy heaven with the saving power of his right hand.*

What gave King David the confidence that the LORD would protect him in battle? Was it that he led the mightiest, most technologically advanced military of the time? Absolutely not! Truth be told, Israel's army was one of the weakest in the region! They didn't even have chariots or horses!

But what they did have gave David the greatest comfort and security - even as he faced enemies far more powerful than what he could muster. The LORD almighty was with them! He alone has the power to save.

The LORD wants us, his believers, to have the same confidence David had in God's ability to keep us safe. But how can we be sure that He has the power to do that? Well, just look at creation! Our universe seems almost unending with countless stars in hundreds of billions of galaxies. Yes, creation itself cries out that our LORD has power!

But just the fact that God has power to create, doesn't necessarily reassure us that he has power to save. To know this we need to look in the Bible, which is chock-full of examples of the LORD faithfully saving his people. For them He divided waters, toppled walls and destroyed powerful armies that opposed them. One of my favorite Old Testaments examples of how God watches over his people is found in 2 Kings when the Aramean army surrounded Elisha and his servant – intent on capturing them. *"Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha*ⁱⁱ. Just think: the LORD doesn't just send guardian angels; he sends guardian angel armies!

However, the greatest demonstration of God's power to save is found in how He sent his Son to win our eternal salvation. Our greatest enemy is not some terrorist group holed up in the mountains of Afghanistan. It's the devil, world and our own sinful flesh that are constantly trying to drive a wedge between us and God by enticing us into sin, doubt and despair. These terrorists are not just trying to kill our bodies; they are trying to drag our souls into hell. Worse yet, we are totally powerless against these spiritual enemies. . . But Jesus isn't. He took it upon himself to save us from these spiritual terrorists by becoming man in order to take away the only weapon they had to separate us from God's love: our sin. He lived the perfect life we failed to live – thereby earning the righteousness we need to stand before God. He took all our sins upon himself on the cross – suffering the punishment we deserve. His resurrection from the grave proves that our sins have been paid for in full. And to make sure we would receive the benefits of this forgiveness, He sent the Holy Spirit to lead us to repent of all sin and create saving faith in our hearts by means of his Word. We are free. Rage as he might, the devil cannot touch believers – all because of Christ. Now if Jesus is able to save us from our most dangerous enemies, then we can be sure that he has the power to protect us from anything!

After the events of 9/11, there was a lot of talk in the media about improving our intelligence, military, and border security to keep us safe. But none of these things could ever make us totally secure. As our sermon text indicates, if we put our trust in “*horses and chariots*” (our military and technological superiority) we will be “brought to our knees and fall.” Such is the fate of all those who trust in such things. Rather we should put our trust in the one who created heaven and earth, controls all things, and has already defeated our greatest enemies. He alone has the power to save us. He alone is able to turn even the evil we experience into something that will serve our eternal welfare!

We trust in the name of the Lord, for he alone has the power to save! But this is not the only reason why we trust in him. If it were, then our hope would be as wishy-washy as hoping that billionaire Bill Gates would give us a million dollars just because he is super-rich. No, we also trust in the name of the Lord because he not only has the power to save; he also promised to do so!

Part Two: He will keep His promises.

We certainly do not deserve anything from God. You know what His law demands: *'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'*ⁱⁱⁱ You know that *whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*^{iv} You know that the wages of sin is eternal death^v in hell - where the worm will not die, nor will the fire be quenched. Our sins put us at enmity with God. We deserve nothing but his wrath and punishment. And isn't that why God allowed a disaster like 9/11 to happen to our country: to punish us for our sins?

If God were to punish America for its sins, this nation would no longer be on the map. No, Jesus tells us that whenever he allows a disaster (regardless of whether it's natural or manmade), his purpose is to remind us of our mortality and need for salvation. He wants us to repent of our sins and turn to him for forgiveness.^{vi} He wants us to let go of the world and cling to him alone. He is with all who hold on to him in faith - promising them many blessings.

And what, exactly, are those blessings? First of all he promises to listen to us in our time of need, saying “*Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.*”^{vii} He promises to hear all our prayers, saying: “*Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*”^{viii} The Lord promises to protect us from all our enemies. He says: *'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. . . . Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all.*^{ix} The LORD promises to work in all things – even the evil we experience – for our good.^x Even death is no longer something we need to fear – as the LORD says through Isaiah: *The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.*^{xi} Finally, the LORD promises believers eternal life, as Jesus once said: *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.*^{xii}

God has promised believers all these blessings and has demonstrated throughout history that he has the power to do what he says. He doesn't protect us because we have earned or deserved it. He does it merely out of love. *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*^{xiii} St. Paul writes in Romans: *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*^{xiv}

When our country was attacked on September 11, 2001, the things our nation trusted in to protect us failed. Our government promised that they would do everything in their power to prevent something like that from happening again – that we don't have to be afraid. I know, however, that no matter what our government does to try to protect us, they will never be able to do it perfectly. We are always in danger. And yet, I am not afraid. Why not? Because I know that my LORD is watching over me and my loved ones. He alone has the power to save and he will keep his promises. Even if the world falls apart and we are surrounded by suffering and death, Christians can be confident that none of these things will be able to separate us from the love God has for us in Christ Jesus our LORD. No matter what happens, we will always remain totally safe in him. Let us share this message with our countrymen so that, through repentance and faith, they too may have the same peace, hope and total security we enjoy in Christ. Amen.

ⁱ Matthew 24:1-14

ⁱⁱ 2 Kings 6:15b-17 NIV84

ⁱⁱⁱ Leviticus 19:2 NIV84

^{iv} James 2:10 NIV84

^v Cf. Romans 6:23 and Isaiah 66:24

^{vi} Cf. Luke 13:2-5

^{vii} Psalm 50:15 NIV84

^{viii} Mark 11:24 NIV84

^{ix} Isaiah 41:9-10,12 NIV84

^x Cf. Romans 8:28

^{xi} Isaiah 57:1-2 NIV84

^{xii} John 10:27-28 NIV84

^{xiii} John 3:16 NIV84

^{xiv} Romans 8:32 NIV84